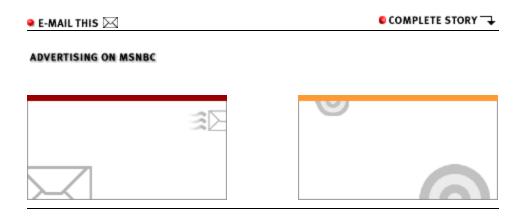
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ARRANGEMENTS BETWEEN developers and third parties to mitigate the loss of wetlands is not working as planned, the the General Accounting Office reported Wednesday.

One main issue is a type of wetlands mitigation called "in-lieu-fee" mitigation, in which a third party collects fees from developers forced to offset wetland losses and spends it on various wetland restoration projects.

The report said Corps officials claimed that in 11 of its 17 districts with the in-lieu option, the number of wetland acres restored, created or preserved offset or exceeded the number adversely impacted.

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But the GAO said "data submitted by over half of those districts did not support these claims."

The report said mitigation efforts were also not assessed for ecological success, leaving some Corps districts to "assume success as soon as the developer pays a fee to an in-lieu organization even if no mitigation has been performed."

The GAO called on the Environmental Protection

Environment news

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The National Wildlife Federation seized on the GAO findings as evidence of

problems with Corps management practices.

"Today's GAO report uncovers extremely questionable management by the Corps of these third-party wetlands mitigation arrangements," the wilderness group said.

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among Corps districts as to what party is legally and financially responsible for the success of mitigation efforts.

Corps officials were not immediately available to comment.

Provisions in the Clean Water Act demand protection and replacement for wetlands, which are disappearing due to the impact of development and agricultural expansion.

(SPECIAL REPORT) MSNBC environment coverage

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